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SUBJECT: TANZANIA'S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Refs: A) 2008 Dar es Salaam 837, B: Dar es Salaam 40

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¶1. (U) Summary and Introduction: Tanzania's current religious identification demographics are 62 percent Christian, 35 percent Muslim and three percent other (traditional beliefs, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i). The Tanzanian state does not gather religious identification census data as a matter of policy. The state and the ruling party have a strongly secular tradition. Religious identification statistics dating from the colonial administration, which is reflected in commonly referenced USG publications (Background Notes, etc.) for lack of any official post-independence data, indicates a split of roughly one-third each for Christian, Muslim and traditional (with negligible numbers for other faiths). Muslims predominate along the coastal strip and the autonomous Zanzibar archipelago. Christians dominate the interior, except for a few Muslim towns established during the days of the Middle East slave trade. Dar es Salaam, the commercial capital and principal city, is mixed but increasingly Christian.

¶2. (U) Tensions are somewhat on the rise between Muslims and Christians in Tanzania, though not worryingly so. Political leaders see it in their self-interest to build broad coalitions of Muslims and Christians, as opposed to mobilizing along religious lines. At the same time, there are competing groups, often divided along pro- and anti-government lines, which cut across religious affiliation.

¶3. (U) To continue augmenting our outreach efforts with faith communities throughout Tanzania, we have created a new Public Diplomacy Specialist (PDS) position within the Public Affairs section, replacing an existing Cultural Affairs Specialist position. One-third of this position is devoted to implementing programming to encourage faith communities to consider favorably U.S. policies and programs. Our staffed - but not funded nor resident - American Presence Post on Zanzibar also has the potential to make lasting gains in this regard.  
End Summary and Introduction.

Christianity: Dominant, but Fractured

¶4. (U) Over the past forty eight years since independence, growth in the Muslim community has kept pace with population growth, while the Christian community has grown much more rapidly at the expense of those who formerly identified with traditional African religions. Given that those who self-identify as followers of traditional African faiths now account for less than 3 percent of the

population, and converts from Islam are extremely rare, Christian growth is nearing a plateau. Consequently, "poaching" among the memberships of rival Christian denominations appears to be on the rise, according to anecdotal information.

15. (U) As regards practice, both Islam and Christianity in Tanzania are noted for including elements of traditional African beliefs in daily practice (usually with the stern disapproval of their respective formal faith leadership). While Muslim practice is deeply rooted in culture and family traditions going back centuries, many Christians have adopted their religious identification only recently, and so tend to mix-in elements of the traditional beliefs followed by their forebears to a greater degree than their Muslim compatriots.

16. (U) Religious demographic data for Tanzania in various United States Government publications (State's Background Notes, CIA World Fact Book, etc.) reflect figures from the British colonial administration. As a matter of policy, the Tanzanian state refuses to pose religious identification questions in its census. A variety of private polls agree that the present proportion of Tanzanians who self-identify as Christian is about 62 percent (up from the late colonial era figure of 33 percent). While we suspect that religious practice has not changed as drastically as these figures indicate, self-identification has changed. Christian proselytizers have enjoyed significant success in independent Tanzania.

17. (U) The Christian community is informally divided between two groups. Most of the members of the historic churches (Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican) come from families that have identified with the church and adopted its norms over generations. These churches set up in Tanzania in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Most of the members of the new, mainly evangelical churches are more recent converts from traditional faiths and so, naturally, retain many practices

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carried over from their former set of beliefs. These churches were established from the 1960s onwards, accelerating in recent years.

18. (U) 6. (U) Catholicism is Tanzania's largest Christian faith. Tanzanian Catholics claim 8,500,800 members, or about one-third of all Tanzanian Christians. The most heavily Catholic regions of the country are the far West great lakes dioceses (Sumbawanga 70, Bukoba 67 percent), parts of the southern highlands (Mbinga 85 percent), parts of Central Tanzania (Mahenge 61 percent) and the far North (Moshi/Mt. Kilimanjaro, 57 percent).

19. (U) The Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches have highly developed administrative structures and constitutions that provide for the selection and election of church leaders. In addition to providing spiritual guidance, these churches offer social services, such as medical care and schools (students attend at a partially- or fully-subsidized cost). Despite their more elaborate and institutionalized organizational structures, these religious institutions have faced a number of intra-denominational conflicts.

110. (U) The Catholic Church, for example, has been engaged in an ongoing conflict with the Marian Faith Healing Ministry of Father Nkwera. The Lutheran Church has had three experiences (in Pare, Northern, and East/Coast Dioceses) of rebel factions attempting to create their own separate dioceses stemming from complaints of misuse of resources and favoritism along ethnic lines. In one case, a violent confrontation lasted from 1990-93 between followers who wanted to create a Meru Diocese and those who wanted to maintain a united Northern Diocese. Since 1994, the Anglican Church has experienced intense disagreements over control of its Mwanza (Lake Victoria) Diocese.

111. (U) For the roughly 140 other churches in Tanzania, this struggle to control resources can take on a more personal dimension. In the smaller denominations, leadership depends more on preaching ability and entrepreneurial flare rather than on administrative capabilities. The competition for followers among these churches is sometimes as intense as the struggles to control the resources that international church connections often bring. While the larger, more bureaucratic churches are not immune, conflicts that seem more

about controlling resources than about theological principles have been more prevalent among the smaller churches, often leading to a splintering of small churches into multiple micro-churches.

¶12. (U) There are three primary interdenominational, Christian-wide associations. The Christian Council of Tanzania is comprised of most of the protestant churches in Tanzania, including the Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, Moravian, Baptist, African Inland, and Brethren Churches. The Dar es Salaam Union of Churches is an association comprised of the above-mentioned Protestant churches, and includes the Catholic and Pentecostal Churches in Dar es Salaam. Finally, the Pentecostal Council of Tanzania includes the Tanzania Assemblies of God Churches, the Church of God in Christ, and other Pentecostal churches across the country. The Tanzania Episcopal Conference (Catholic), the Christian Council of Tanzania, as well as individual Christian leaders, often make pronouncements and provide guidance on political and social issues that appear in the Tanzanian media.

#### Islam: Well-Established, But Static

¶13. (U) Islam arrived on Tanzania's Swahili coast and the isles of Zanzibar about a thousand years ago. Today, Tanzania's Muslim community is estimated at 35 percent (about 14 million), while the one million inhabitants of the Zanzibar archipelago (Unguja and Pemba) are 98 percent Muslim. Tanzania is mistakenly perceived by many outsiders as a predominantly Muslim country. This perception is probably due to the fact that the capital and largest city is located on the predominantly Muslim coastal strip and has an Arabic name (Dar es Salaam translates as "Haven of Peace").

¶14. (U) In recent days, the Zanzibari government announced it would seek permission from the Union government to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) if ongoing internal discussions by the Union government concerning proposed OIC membership for Tanzania as a whole prove fruitless (ref b). Zanzibar attempted to join the OIC several years ago, but was forced to withdraw by the Union government on the grounds that membership is incompatible with the Union's secular constitution. Opponents of OIC membership, both secularists and Christian leaders, ask how such membership can now be squared with the constitution, since it has not been amended in

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this regard.

¶15. (U) Most Tanzanian Muslims follow Sunni traditions and are ethnically indigenous African (with the remainder being of Arab, Persian or South Asian origin). There are also Shia Ismailis and Ithna-Asheris present, whose members are almost exclusively of South Asian origin. There is also a smaller Ibadi sect that has a primarily Omani Arab membership.

¶16. (U) Authority within the Muslim community generally comes from holding a leadership position in government-recognized Islamic organizations such as BAKWATA (Swahili acronym for National Muslim Council of Tanzania), or in organizations such as the Dar es Salaam Islamic club. Other organizations not officially recognized by the state, such as the Muslim Writers Workshop and the Committee for the Defense of Islamic Rights, also create pathways for leaders to emerge by providing a platform to challenge the officially-recognized leadership.

¶17. (SBU) Successful business people, intellectuals or politicians can also become influential within the Islamic community. Sheikhs (mosque leaders) and muftis (Islamic law specialists) gain authority from their understanding of Islam. This knowledge can be acquired through experience working, studying and teaching at local religious institutions, or it can be obtained through studying at outside Islamic institutions of higher learning. Some Tanzanians pursue study at these institutions in Iran and Sudan. This has created friction with the government due to suspicions that those studying in such places may have received subversive indoctrination.

¶18. (SBU) A number of Muslim community leaders, such as Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda and Sheikh Juma Mbukuzi, have emerged because of their outspoken and bold criticism of the state and its relationship to Islam. However, within the Umma (Islamic community) there is no

set path that one must follow to obtain leadership accreditation. For example, former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, the late Vice President Ali Omar Jumar, and leaders of BAKWATA have used their connections to the state to gain influence within Tanzania's Islamic community.

¶19. (U) The multiple paths to assuming leadership positions in the Muslim community have resulted in the emergence of a variety of complementary and conflicting perspectives. There is a general division between those who feel that Muslims have been held back and oppressed by the state and those who uphold the status quo relationship between their religion and the government. This, coupled with a struggle to control resources and gain prestige within local Muslim communities, has led to a number of (occasionally violent) conflicts over the control of mosques, which usually pit a group of younger anti-status quo sheikhs versus older pro-status quo sheikhs who are often associated with BAKWATA.

¶20. (U) The rise of Islam as a growing political force presents, on the surface, a bipolar struggle between the followers of Islam and Christianity, with similarities and differences in terms of political mobilization. However, both religious communities consist of a number of competing groups, often divided along pro- and anti-government lines, which cut across religious affiliation.

#### Traditional Beliefs: Diminishing, yet Pervasive

¶21. (U) Those who self-identify as followers of traditional (animist) religions make up less than three percent of the population. However, elements of traditional belief are widely held by many Tanzanian Christians and Muslims, especially in rural areas. Unlike Christianity and Islam, traditional spiritual beliefs lack formal organizational structures and ties to resources from outside the country. They tend to form no cohesive organization, as they are Balkanized among the various ethnic communities whose traditional beliefs and practices they uphold. Leaders of traditional religions often gain their expertise serving an apprenticeship, usually under a family mentor. Their formal education levels are often low or non-existent. There is a widespread belief that some politicians and business leaders, while formally identifying with Christianity or Islam, will seek the help of traditional healers and spiritual leaders to obtain specific benefits (win an election, gain a contract, etc.).

¶22. (U) Major ethnicities known for loyalty toward their traditional beliefs are: in the North, Hadzabe, Maasai, Sandeawe, Chagga, and

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Arusha; in far West Great Lakes region, Sakuma and Haya; on the coast, Zaramo and Makonde. Tanzanians commonly consider the traditionally nomadic Hadzabe and Maasai to be the staunchest adherents of their respective traditional beliefs. Many Tanzanians practice rituals derived from traditional beliefs during festivals, births, deaths, marriages, and other significant ceremonies, although they may self-identify as Christian or Muslim.

#### Inter-faith Amity: Upholding Tanzania's Tolerant Traditions

¶23. (U) A societal value of tolerance and a distaste for identity politics has influenced the conscious decisions of many of the main political actors and identity group members to eschew religious (or ethnic) mobilization. Unlike in many other African countries, Tanzania almost never ask one another about ethnic or religious affiliation. These societal values have emerged as one of founding President "Mwalimu" Julius Nyerere's most important contributions to national development. It is worth noting that the ruling party has an informal policy of rotating presidential candidates between Christians (Nyerere and Mkapa, the first and third presidents) and Muslims (Mwinyi and Kikwete, the second and fourth presidents).

¶24. (U) According to a REDET (Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania) study (2001), very few people explained differences in education or employment in terms of religious bias. With regard to questions concerning job placement, promotions and favoritism in the work place, respondents who felt religion was a factor ranged from one percent or lower. For education, recent studies report that

despite the differences in enrollment and pass rates in secondary school, only two percent of the survey respondents feel that Muslims are discriminated against because of their religion in terms of access to education. When asked: "what strategies could the government adopt to ensure a more equitable distribution of educational resources?" no one stated directly that there should be interventions on behalf of Muslims. At the university level, while there are fewer Muslims than Christians (consistent with demography), there appears to be no difference in percentages regarding the pass rate. In short, although disparities exist, most Tanzanians do not attribute these to be related to discrimination along religious lines.

¶25. (U) That said, lately tensions have been somewhat on the rise between Muslims and Christians in Tanzania due to ongoing debates over khadhi courts (ref A) and Tanzania's proposed membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (ref B). An additional reason for increased tensions is the rise in political visibility and assertiveness of the Muslim community over the past 15 years. These tensions, however, are mild. Tanzanians routinely socialize across religious (and ethnic) lines.

¶26. (U) The most active interfaith group, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, was established in 2000. Other interfaith groups are The Peace and Reconciliation Council for Muslims and Christians and The Muslim and Christian Leaders Council for Peace and Religion, which is comprised of leaders from the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Tanzania and BAKWATA.

#### Religion in Politics: No Political Polarization On Creed

¶27. (U) There is a realization among both opposition and ruling party leaders that using religious appeals at a national level is likely to cause a strong counter-response and mobilization amongst the rival group. The leaders of all the major parties feel that it is impossible to win power or to successfully govern without the support of both Muslims and Christians. Therefore political leaders see it in their self-interest to build broad coalitions of Muslims and Christians, as opposed to mobilizing along religious lines. Nonetheless, Tanzanians tend to identify Civic United Front (CUF), whose strength is on Zanzibar (especially Pemba), as a Muslim party, while the leaders of mainland-based Chadema (also opposition) are notably Christian. The ruling party is largely viewed as secular (except for its Zanzibar wing, which occasionally stresses an Islamic identity when it feels under political pressure to do so).

¶28. (U) Tanzania's religious communities lack group consensus on political direction. Divisions between, and within, both Christian denominations and Muslim mosques have rendered group solidarity on political issues virtually impossible. This, in turn, creates a strong disincentive for party leaders to manipulate religion for

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political ends, or, coming from the other direction, of particular religious affiliations substantially affecting the political process.

#### Comment: Engaging with Tanzania's Faith Communities

¶29. (SBU) Christian Tanzanians tend to perceive the United States as a friendly, Christian-majority ally (downplaying the United States' own secular political traditions). Tanzanian Muslims are congenial as development partners and as eager development assistance recipients, however, many Muslims, and especially their faith leaders, tend to be wary and distrustful of U.S. foreign policy or of cooperation with us beyond the superficial. When our engagement begins to touch on religion, such as providing books to madrassas (vetted for appropriateness with a Muslim civil society organization), hosting iftaars for destitute Islamic orphanages, or bringing Islamic Scholars to discuss Muslim Life in America, we invariably enrage the mainland Islamic scholars and media and endure vitriol in that Friday's Islamic press. This is markedly less so in Zanzibar (see below). Anecdotal evidence also indicates that U.S. foreign policy, as it pertains to Somalia and the Middle East, is frequently a topic of discussion during Friday sermons in area



mosques.

¶30. (SBU) Over the past year, we have extended our MSP goals from exclusive Islamic community outreach to working with all faith communities. Our greatest engagement with Tanzanian faith communities is through direct funding of faith-based organizations working on health related issues, especially HIV/AIDS. Besides hosting Speakers Programs on Muslim Life in America, and Performing Arts Initiatives using Islamic music groups, we attend and fund seminars held by faith communities. We routinely ask prominent faith leaders to open and close large embassy events. The U.S. military chaplain from the Combined Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTTF-HOA) in Djibouti has made annual visits to Tanzania aimed at increasing his understanding of the country's interfaith dialogue. Our programming is dependent, however, on current events. While we planned well in advance for the visit of an American Speaker on Islamic Studies scheduled to arrive in late January, all of our mainland Muslim contacts cancelled their participation in our programming due to the Gaza-Israel hostilities.

¶31. (SBU) We have sustained engagement with the Islamic communities on the islands of Zanzibar. Zanzibaris do not appear as defensive (or offended) about U.S. overtures as their mainland co-religionists. This may be because Muslims are an overwhelming majority in Zanzibar. However, Zanzibari support for our public diplomacy endeavors is often tepid. Zanzibari disagreement over U.S. foreign policy is rarely shared with us officially by faith leaders we work with there. Zanzibaris voice appreciation for our respect for Islam as shown by our Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation grants which have restored three historically significant mosques over the past three years. We also provided a large grant to an influential Islamic radio station on Zanzibar to promote the values of dialogue, tolerance, and peace to a wider audience.

¶32. (U) To continue augmenting our outreach efforts with faith communities throughout Tanzania, we have created a new Public Diplomacy Specialist (PDS) position within the Public Affairs section, replacing an existing Cultural Affairs Specialist position. One-third of this position is devoted to implementing programming to encourage faith communities to consider favorably U.S. policies and programs. Our staffed - but not funded nor resident - American Presence Post on Zanzibar also has the potential to make lasting gains in this regard.

ANDRE